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# Soviet Presence in the Third World: Developments in the Past Decade (U)

A Reference Aid

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# Soviet Presence in the Third World: Developments in the Past Decade (U)

A Reference Aid  
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This paper was prepared by [redacted]  
Political Instability Branch, Office of Global Issues,  
with support from the Communist Activities  
Branch and the Instability and Emergency Center,  
ODI. Comments and queries are welcome and may  
be directed to the Chief, Political Instability Branch,  
ODI [redacted]

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- Hanoi was made to accept a compromise settlement notwithstanding the withdrawal of US ground forces from South Vietnam.
- Although the Soviets contributed to India's victory over Pakistan in 1971, they watched quietly when the US and Israel strongly backed King Hussein during Jordan's conflict with the PLO and Syria in 1970.

**Trends**  
During the 1950s, following the reversal of its self-defeating division of the world into "two camps," the Soviets succeeded in making major inroads in Egypt, India, Indonesia, Ghana, and other former Western colonies. But Moscow's diplomatic and propaganda support, modest economic aid, and arms sales failed to deter continuing US activism and did not prevent a string of major setbacks during the 1960s—in Zaire, Laos, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Ghana, Indonesia, Mali, and the 1967 Arab-Israeli war.

- Nor did the Soviets make major headway during the next half decade, notwithstanding US difficulties in Southeast Asia:
- In 1972, two years after Moscow obtained a major military presence in Egypt, the Soviets were just suddenly ousted by President Sadat.
- In the Sudan, a Soviet-supported coup attempt against President Nimeiri failed.
- President Salvador Allende's regime in Chile was overthrown.

Thereafter, however, and through the remainder of the 1970s, the Soviet Union notably improved its position and influence in the Third World. Whereas the general global perception in the two previous decades usually was of trends encumbered by enough conflicting developments and complications to make interested observers cautious in their conclusions about the real extent of Moscow's gains and losses, most analysts currently believe Moscow has appreciably improved its position in the Third World, both in absolute terms and especially in its competition with the US. The major events leading to this conclusion include:

- North Vietnam's 1975 defeat of South Vietnam, acquisition of control over Laos, and 1978 intervention in Kampuchea.

- The Soviet-supported MPLA's 1975-76 victory in the Angolan civil war, following the intervention of Soviet-armed Cuban troops transported by Cuban and Soviet aircraft.
- Ethiopia's 1977-78 Soviet-Generalized drubbing of Somalia in the Ogaden War, following the intervention of Cuban troops supported by a massive Soviet military airlift.
- In 1978, Soviet-supported Communist coup in Afghanistan, acquisition of considerable Soviet influence in Kabul, and the 1979 Soviet invasion.
- The Shah's ouster in Iran, the new clerical regime's virulent hatred of the United States, and seizure of the American Embassy and ensuing hostage crisis.
- China's relative restraint and early withdrawal during the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese War.
- The Cuban-supported Sandinista's ouster of President Somoza from Nicaragua in 1979 and developing insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala.
- Mexican seizure of 12 friendship treaties between 1971 and 1981 (two of which were later abrogated).

More recently, prominent developments less favorable to Soviet interests have occurred. The momentum of Soviet gains and shocks to US interests appear to have slowed considerably owing to:

- 1. The collapse of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, where Moscow has been reluctant to make new major commitments.
- 2. The rise of particularly Islamic hostility to the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan, and related failure of Cuba's chairmanship of the Non-aligned Movement.
- 3. The Polish crisis in Poland that has required substantial Soviet attention and perhaps made Moscow reluctant to be more engaged elsewhere.
- 4. The Iran-Iraq truce and Iran, in the Gulf, and Tehran have become considerably less aloof to the other more than they have appreciated the modest Soviet support that they have each received.
- 5. The withdrawal of Soviet and Cuban fighters, withdrawal of Libyan troops from Chad in 1981, and failure of Quduf's 1982 OAU summit.
- 6. The negotiated settlement in Zimbabwe, Prime Minister Mugabe's withdrawal from ties with Moscow, and the eclipse of Joshua Nkomo, Moscow's principal ally.
- 7. Increased African and local insurgent threats to Angola and Mozambique.

- Successful elections in El Salvador and the improved counterinsurgency outlook there and in Guatemala.
- The 1982 conflict in Lebanon in which the Syrian Air Force was humiliated, the PLO was driven from Beirut, and Moscow was a bystander.

**Soviet Gains**  
Although Moscow has recently failed to make new major gains comparable to its earlier achievements, its position in the Third World nevertheless remains

- greater than it was a decade ago:
- Soviet naval aircraft periodically operate out of Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, Ethiopia, South Yemen, Syria, and Libya, whereas a decade earlier they spent far less time in the Third World and operated only out of Cuba, Egypt, and Somalia.
- Moscow is the principal supplier of arms to 34 LDCs compared with 17 a decade ago (including Cuba, Vietnam, Mongolia, and North Korea).
- The Soviets are earning up to \$6 billion a year in hard currencies from the sale of arms and military equipment to Third World countries.

- Nicaragua poses a serious conventional military threat to its neighbors and seeks to sustain the insurgency in El Salvador and Guatemala.
- Vietnam dominates Indochina and threatens Thailand.
- The Soviets may yet turn Afghanistan into a new Mongolia, and Pakistan and Iran have been further threatened.
- The setback to US interests in the Persian Gulf caused by the Shah's ouster represents a continuing Soviet gain.

Moscow's aggressive foreign and defense policies also have paid off in the daily currency of Third World attention to Soviet interests. The Soviets have not gained control over noncontiguous Third World countries; but they have helped to install, keep in power, and otherwise support a host of governments amenable to Soviet interests and objectives and hostile to those of the US.

In still other nations, the USSR has gained an entrance and a respect leading to caution among some otherwise inclined to deny or attack its interests. Thus, Moscow has gotten off relatively lightly in international forums, despite its frequently aggressive behavior. The increased Soviet presence in the Third World

also affords greater opportunities for intelligence gathering and subversion.

Besides its strategic nuclear arsenal and Eurasian based conventional forces—the principal foundation of its international position vis-a-vis the West, China and relatedly the Third World—the Soviet Union sought to increase its assets and influence by:

- Military activities and operations:

— Weapon and other military equipment sales totaling \$59.8 billion in 1972-81. The USSR is now the world's leading arm exporter.

- Inviting foreign military personnel to the USSR—to observe exercises, celebrate holidays and other important occasions.

- Forward deploying naval units in the world oceans, including the Mediterranean, Caribbean, West African waters, and Arabian

- Moscow's Warsaw Pact allies, Cuba, Libya, and North Korea have given LDCs military and economic aid and technical assistance.
- 35,000 Cuban troops are deployed in Angola and Ethiopia.
- East German security units and intelligence officers have taken on operational responsibilities in Angola, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Zambia, South Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Nicaragua.

- Other activities:
  - Direct and indirect Soviet and allied material assistance and training to insurgent and terrorist groups attempting to overturn or overthrow the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

- Financial support to Communist parties, front groups, and other opposition organizations in numerous LDCs.
- Media propaganda and disinformation activities.
- Subversion of moderate and pro-Western regimes.

- Economic aid and cultural exchanges:
  - Between 1954 and 1981, the USSR extended \$22.4 billion in credits and grants to LDCs, 65 percent of this in 1973-81.

— In 1981, 34,970 Soviet economic technicians in LDCs, and some 5,000 LDC tech-

— At the end of 1981, 42,800 LDC academic students were in the USSR.

- Encouragement, support, and orchestration of a as surrogates:
  - A pattern of cooperation and coordination threatening the stability of moderate and

Western LDCs and enhancing their own mutual security—exists between the USSR, or members of the Warsaw Pact, Cuba, Vietnam, Libya, Nicaragua, Grenada, Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, South Yemen,

and a number of other states.

1973 Dhafar Rebellion in Oman.  
Assassination of Portuguese Guinea insurgents.

1974-75	Kurdish insurgency in Iraq. Cyprus conflict. Syria-Israeli conflict.
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1975	Insurgency in Oman.
1975-76	Argentan civil war. Lebanon civil war.
1977	Mercenary attack on Binis.
1977-78	Ethiopia-Somalia conflict.

1978-79	Cina-Vietnam conflict.
1979	Insurgency in Afghanistan.
1981	South African incursion in Mozambique. South African incursion in Angola. Seizure of Soviet fishing vessels by Morocco. Israel-Syria conflict in Lebanon.

1992	Falkland Islands conflict.
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